

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

December 10, 2004

The Week Ahead

Mon., Dec. 13 – The Commissioner attends a Children's Cabinet meeting at the state Capitol.

Tue., Dec. 14 – The Commissioner attends a training retreat at Hachland Hill Vineyard in Joelton, Tenn.

Wed., Dec. 15 – The Commissioner continues the training retreat at Hachland Hill Vineyard in Joelton, Tenn. The Commissioner also attends budget hearings at the state Capitol.

DCS Employee News

Diane Hurth, team coordinator of child and family teams in Shelby County, will celebrate 30 years of employment with DCS on January 2.

DCS extends condolences to the family and friends of DCS employee **Rick Myers**. Myers passed away this week after being hospitalized in Chattanooga for several days with complications from a brain aneurysm. Myers joined DCS in 1987 as an officer and became a corporal in March 2004. He was 46 years old.

The funeral will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Mooneyham Freewill Baptist Church in Spencer, Tenn. Cards may be sent to his wife, Cindy Myers, at 132 Lawson Lane, Quebeck, Tenn., 38579.

Summer Slimdown '04: Notice of Action

Submitted by Mary Beth Franklyn – CS Program Director 3, Blue Ribbon Team

During the summer of 2004, field staff was asked to make suggestions about ways to decrease the amount of paperwork necessary to accomplish certain tasks or processes. As part of the "Slimdown," **Walter Rose**, a juvenile justice case manager from Sullivan County in the Northeast Region, made a suggestion about the Notice of Action. Rose suggested that the Notice of Action to TNKids be linked to the permanency plan template, so that the notice of action would be completed and readily available.

"Walter is a wonderful problem solver with creative ideas. I always like to run issues by Walter for his input," said **Jacqueline Lee**, director of probation services in Central Office.

Many thought Rose's proposal would enhance the department by reducing the time necessary to complete paperwork and ensure that notices are automatically generated when they need to be sent. After reviewing due process requirements and how things are currently done in both TNKids and in the field, rules for a system change in TNKids were developed (many thanks to **Frank Mix** and **Laurie Baker** in IS).

Because the Notice of Action is triggered by a Level 2, 3 or 4 placement determination, it was decided that the reviews, hearings and CFTMs section of TNKids should capture a "level of care" determination, since that decision is made in the context of the CFTM. (Yes, a level of care will need to be recorded on the review/CFTM record when there is a determination or change in level of care). Permanency plans will also be linked to the review/CFTM record, representing the meeting where the permanency plan was developed, so any Notice of Action generated from that same review will also be associated with the permanency plan.

This does change the current process, in that a specific Notice of Action would be generated with the recording of the meeting and, therefore, provided afterward. As you can see, there are several changes for both the child welfare tracking system (TNKids) and the way the process is handled in the region. Of course, additional details will follow with the release and the concurrent training.

The outcome for this effort and change will be very positive. This will take a lot of the "thinking" away from the process, and allow TNKids to do some of the thinking for us. You won't have to worry about when to provide a notice of action and who needs it. After thoughtfully considering the TNKids updates, it was determined that this enhancement could be included with the May '05 release of new builds.

"Building Families – Once Child at a Time"

Submitted by Krisann Hodges, Assistant General Counsel, Central Office

The DCS legal department is excited to be a part of the "Building Families – One Child at a Time" initiative. It has given the legal staff an opportunity to participate in one of the most rewarding phases of our work – adoption finalization. DCS attorneys are typically not involved in this final stage of moving a child into a new family. After the termination of parental rights, adoptive parents hire private attorneys to file the adoption petition. We don't usually get to witness the happy conclusion of cases we have worked on from removal to termination. When the Commissioner approached the regional general counsels to ask for our cooperation and assistance, the legal staff was ready to jump into action and help in whatever way the regions needed. Beginning in October, the legal staff in each region met with local staff to offer assistance in a variety of ways. As our regional general counsel in the East region, Laura Levy, reported, "everyone in legal will do whatever we can (including baking cookies for the parties) to prioritize these cases, so that these adoptions can be final before the holidays." Fortunately, the DCS attorneys were able to offer not only baking assistance, but legal help as well.

Since November, the DCS attorneys have been reporting on the progress in each region. One of the common themes is how pleased the judges are to have a special occasion to celebrate

adoptions. Many judges (including Judge Muriel Robinson, who will finalize additional adoptions on December 20) have agreed to set special dockets and to take time for a little post-adoption partying.

In the Upper Cumberland region, Anne Austin has been working with Julie Cook and other great staff to organize their event. She reports that legal helped line up the judges, reserve the jury selection room for the reception, review the cases with the case managers to identify and try to resolve any legal barriers to adoption, contact the six attorneys handling the adoptions to make sure they would have everything ready, and even purchased 12 teddy bears to give to the children, because Chancellor Neal wanted them to all have teddy bears. In Shelby County, the court held a docket on November 20, resulting in almost 20 finalizations in one day – a new record for that county, and they planned more special dockets for December. In the Southwest region, Nancy Nelson reports that even though one chancery court was unable to set a special date, they were able to find a solution and they will not be slowing down the pace. Southwest, like many other regions, are inviting the press, private attorneys, judges, and community partners to attend their reception. In Davidson County, legal and program staff met with Judge Robinson who has agreed to set a special docket to sign finalizations.

We wish the best of luck to all of the regions as they head toward the finish line and, as always, please let your legal department know how we may help our clients serve children.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Submitted by Karen Davenport, Regional Liaison for QA Technical Support, QA/CQI Division, Office of Performance Enhancement

On December 8, all 12 regional CQI coordinators, along with the Central Office CQI liaisons, came together for a full day of sharing and learning. It was a great opportunity for everyone to get to know one another, as well as a time to share any barriers they might be experiencing and to talk about the successes they've had thus far. Changing the way people are accustomed to doing things is never a favorite activity, but these folks are charging ahead with a positive attitude and an eagerness to get their regions up and running with the CQI process. These coordinators have realized that the key to success in their regions is teamwork.

Diane Wilson, conference chair for the Usability Professionals' Association, wrote the following tips for optimizing individual and team achievement in the workplace:

Ordinary people can achieve extraordinary results

Teamwork offers alternatives. One is the synergy that occurs when people become motivated to work together. Another is high performance level that accompanies a highly functioning team.

Allow people to fail

People who are afraid to fail are also afraid to take chances. Optimal solutions to difficult problems almost always require taking chances. The basic paradigm shift that has to occur is

to minimize the cost of failure. One way of minimizing this cost is to eliminate artificial penalties for failure. Yes, real failures have real costs. It is not necessary to add artificial costs for failure; another name for this is “punishment.”

Criticism equals loyalty

People who care want the best. An organization that wants improved results or improved work environments will understand that people criticize things as they are because they care. People who do not care will not criticize.

Teamwork equals cheating

This attitude is instilled in us throughout our education, most of which is built on a competitive framework. A student wins by being better than everyone else. A student who builds on the work of others has not proven that he is better; instead, he has cheated by not doing everything himself. And cheating is punished. The result is destructive in many ways. The best solutions are rarely achieved. People are suspicious of each other. (The most suspicious people are those who are assigned to work in teams; they always suspect that someone else isn't contributing.) These attitudes carry over into the workplace. New problems require new solutions, but old problems require new solutions too. People who do too well are suspect. All too often, the “best” solution to a problem is “my” solution, rather than the one that solves the problem most effectively. Effective teamwork requires a new approach. Using an existing solution frees up resources to solve other problems. People's achievements, in addition to team achievements, need to be recognized and celebrated. Overall achievement increases when people have the freedom to re-use.

Negotiating for Win-Win

In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey identifies this as one of the seven habits. Win-Win means that nobody loses. At its best, win-win means that all parties get what they want. Win-Win is a fundamental aspect of effective teamwork. Each achievement by each person or group contributes to the effectiveness and success of the team.

Ego suppression

This is another shift from the educational paradigm. Teams are more effective when each person places the team's achievements ahead of personal achievements. Teams improve their effectiveness when they recognize and study their failings with an attitude of, “How can we do better?” rather than, “Whom do we punish?” But to achieve this paradigm shift, team members must truly trust the team and the teamwork process. Teamwork exists not only between individuals, but also between the team and the larger organization, and between the team as a whole and each individual.

“We bring people together because we know they will disagree.”

Disagreement and problems are major sources of innovation. Teams which use disagreement to encourage innovation must also be ready to deal with conflict management and conflict reduction. Conflict is not useful.

“A highly functioning team does not need either carrots or sticks.”

As much of the above hints, teamwork itself can be rewarding to each individual. A highly functioning team does not need carrots or sticks; the team environment itself provides the rewards for teamwork.

Core Leadership

**CORE Leadership Meeting
Elizabeth Black, Presiding
December 7, 2004**

Summer Slim Down - Status on the Notice of Action automated in TNKIDS

The Status on the Notice of Action will be automated and attached to the permanency plans. Mary Beth Franklyn and Frank Mix are working with IS and have developed the business rules, which will be included in the May '05 build.

Executive directors will follow up with Andrea Turner to include additional Summer Slim Down suggestions to included in the Weekly Wrap Up.

Problem Solving Presentation

Commissioner Miller discussed the “Gripe to Goals” form. She explained the importance of determining the root of problems, rather than complaining unproductively. With the “grip to goals” method, people can redefine their gripes to pinpoint actual problems and issues.

Steps to Problem Solving:

- Define problem
- Set action steps
- Determine who is responsible
- Set timeframes
- Determine how to evaluate

The Commissioner also presented a handout on problem classification. She said that it is important that we have the ability to analyze problems and classify them to avoid spending time worrying about things beyond our control. The form included three types of problems classifications:

Type I: Group has complete control of the problem
Group can identify and define problem
Group has control of data collection, including specialists' input
Group has authority to implement solutions

Type II: Group has limited control of the problem
Group can identify and define problem
Group has control of data collection, including specialists' input

Group may lack experience to analyze problem or find situations
Group may lack authority to implement solutions
Group can reach and influence ultimate decision maker

Type III: Group does not have control of problem
Group can identify and define problem
Group may be able to collect data
Group may lack experience to analyze problem or find situations
Group may lack authority to implement solutions
Group cannot reach or influence ultimate decision maker

Key point: Problem solving is an empowerment process. Gripping hinders productivity and lowers morale.

Merry Christmas

The Commissioner announced that \$200,000 will be dispersed across regions to help them ensure that every child has gifts for Christmas.

Contracting Brown Paper Processing

Randal Lea presented a flow chart of the brown paper processing of contracting, explaining that this not the same as provider monitoring (although that feeds data into it). We need more flexibility regarding contracting – can't take a month to get an amendment.

The next steps involve determining needs. The child placement & private provider division needs an internal needs assessment. We need to revisit what CSAs do, for example, with direct services and contract providers. It is also instrumental to use outcomes and data to impact re-contracting. All accountability needs to be in one place for decision-making and will funnel into performance enhancement. Utilization review hasn't been represented here, but needs to be given priority this month.



In charity, there is no excess.

-Sir Francis Bacon

What a child doesn't receive, he can seldom later give.

-P.D. James

